



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

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MILLIONS OF DUCKS FLYING NORTH AS MIGRATIONS BEGIN

Between 55 and 60 million migratory waterfowl are winging their way northward as the annual spring migrations to the breeding grounds in Alaska, Canada, and northern States get under way, the Bureau of Biological Survey, United States Department of the Interior, estimated today. Though final reports of the nationwide inventory held last January are not completed, it is generally believed that the birds are returning to the breeding grounds in somewhat better condition than last year.

Regarding reports during the past winter that many ducks starved in the cold periods, Survey officials declared that laboratory examinations of birds from several areas showed without exception that the affected birds were subnormal and usually the victims of lead poisoning. It was this latter condition, it is believed, that prevented some of the waterfowl from continuing their usual migratory flight and resulted in their starvation when freezing weather cut off the food supplies. Investigations however, revealed no considerable waterfowl losses as a result of starvation.

During the fall migration last year some observers placed the southward flight of migratory birds as much as 20 percent greater than that for the fall flight of

1938. While Survey officials believed these figures were excessive, the Bureau's investigations left no doubt that the breeding season had been successful and that additional gains had been made.

A preliminary study of the data obtained in this year's January inventory confirms the observations made last summer and fall by the four flyway biologists of the Biological Survey, and it appears that the continental supply of waterfowl returning northward this year may be as much as 15 percent greater than last spring.

Though the migratory waterfowl population as a whole is thus increasing at an encouraging rate, Survey officials expressed disappointment at the slow rate of recovery of canvasbacks and redheads, on which special hunting restrictions have been in effect in recent years. They also expressed concern for Canada geese. One explanation for the slow recovery of the geese, it was said, was an excessive kill made in some parts of the country.

Biological Survey experts are also apprehensive regarding the forthcoming nesting season. Reports from the southern part of the breeding grounds are somewhat alarming, it was said. There is great danger of drought conditions that may be as serious as were those in 1934.

Reports of the U. S. Weather Bureau and the Dominion Meteorological Service of Canada indicate a great deficiency in precipitation over the central part of the continent. Unless spring rains are copious, the waterfowl may face another grave situation.

It will be recalled that by 1935, the migratory waterfowl population of the continent had dwindled to what is hoped will prove to be an all-time low. Their numbers were then estimated at about 30 million. The Biological Survey recommended

rather severe hunting restrictions to save the breeding stock from greater depletion. As a result of these restrictions and an enlarged refuge program, the birds during the past five years have been able to take advantage of improved climatic conditions and have increased steadily, as shown by the annual January inventories.

Though almost the entire country east of the Rocky Mountains was under a blanket of snow and ice, which extended south to the Gulf of Mexico, about 2,000 Biological Survey workers and cooperators joined in the inventory last January. Assisting the observers were the Army Air Corps, Naval Air Service, Coast Guard, a commercial tire company, the Soil Conservation Service, National Park Service, Forest Service, State conservation departments, and others.

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